



UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ROSA L. DeLAURO

3RD DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

January 23, 2014

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As, you know, the Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) is working to implement and enforce a country-of-origin labeling (COOL) rule, efforts which I strongly support. That is why I am deeply concerned that the explanatory statement of the Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY2014 does not approve of AMS spending related to COOL implementation and enforcement.

U.S. consumers overwhelmingly support country-of-origin labeling so that they know where products originate as they look to make choices in the marketplace. As you know, in 2002, after years of advocacy by consumer and farming groups, Congress enacted mandatory country-of-origin labeling for beef, seafood, fruits and vegetables and other products to enable consumers to make informed choices about the food they buy and eat.

Following years of delay, in 2009 the COOL law was implemented, requiring retailers, such as full-line grocery stores, supermarkets, and club warehouse stores, to notify their customers with information regarding the source of certain foods. These include muscle cut and ground meats: beef, veal, pork, lamb, goat, and chicken; wild and farm-raised fish and shellfish; fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables; peanuts, pecans, and macadamia nuts; and ginseng.

Many countries across the globe have some form of country-of-origin labeling and American consumers also have a right to know the origins of their food. Unfortunately, big business and their supporters have been working to delay these requirements from going into effect, actions that would be a step backward and must not be allowed to happen.

In 2012 Canada and Mexico, two of the biggest exporters of meat to the United States challenged the law through the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Administration responded by rightly defending our country-of-origin labeling law before the WTO.

As you know, in the wake of the WTO ruling that country-of-origin labels were too ambiguous, USDA crafted modest changes to the regulations to provide new labels that more clearly disclose information to consumers about where cattle were born, raised, and slaughtered. These changes should bring COOL into compliance with the rules of the WTO as USDA continues its obligation to enforce the law during the ongoing WTO process.

If your Department does not enforce COOL, U.S. ranchers will not be able to differentiate their products with a U.S. label and consumers will not have the information they need at the point of purchase. Accurate information is essential in a competitive, free market and COOL provides consumers with essential information about the origin of their food.

While the rules are being contested in court by meat industry stakeholders and the governments, I strongly urge USDA to continue forward with implementation and enforcement of COOL and I offer my support in doing so. American families deserve the complete story of where their food comes from.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Rosa DeLauro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress